



Godfrey-Lee Public Schools

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Early Childhood Center (PK-2)
Godfrey Elementary (3-5)
Lee Middle School (6-8)
Lee High School (9-12)
East Lee Campus (10-12)

David Britten
LTC, US Army, Retired
Superintendent

Roxanne Claxton
Assistant Superintendent
for Finance, H.R. and
Operations

Dr. Carol Lautenbach
Assistant Superintendent
for Elementary & Title I
Programs

Kathryn Curry
MS/HS Principal

James Jensen
Director of Community &
Alternative Education

Jane Dykhouse
Director of Student
Services

Daniel Townsend
Technology and Media
Services Supervisor

Scott Bergman
Operations &
Transportation Supervisor

Emily Truax
Executive Assistant

Sarah Stone
Food Service Manager

Board of Education

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David Townsend
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December 5, 2012

Hon. Lisa Lyons
Chairperson
Michigan House of Representatives
Education Committee

Rep. Lyons and Members of the Committee:

I'm here today to respectfully request that you not agree to the current form of HB 6004 (Substitute H-1), a measure to add four sections to the Revised School Code and amend six existing sections to establish in statute the Education Achievement Authority.

I have the honor of leading a median-sized, urban school district in Wyoming, Michigan adjacent to the Grand Rapids and Wyoming Public School Districts. It's a district I once attended as a student and I take great pride in the history, rich culture, and lately the academic accomplishments despite the growing odds against success.

Our district's demographics include 70% Hispanic, 14% African-American, and 14% Caucasian. Many of our students are first or second generation immigrants leading to the highest percentage of limited English proficiency in the State of Michigan, according to 2010 data. In addition, our students battle the effects of poverty daily with the highest percentage of student-age population living in poverty in Kent County, along with a nearly 90% free and reduced lunch rate. All of these factors have grown exponentially since 2001 during a time when state and local resources for public education have shrunk.

I cite these not as excuses but so you will appreciate what we as a community-based school system have been able to accomplish in the past few years. Our early childhood school is often cited as one of the best in the county if not West Michigan. We moved into all-day, every-day kindergarten more than five years ago when it was apparent we had a growing ELL population living under poverty conditions. It has worked despite taking a significant toll on our declining financial resources. The intensive interventions and innovative learning programs we've introduced over the years have reduced special education referrals significantly and raised the all-important reading scores substantially.

Our comprehensive high school has a different story to tell. It was identified as a persistently low achieving school in the spring of 2010 and was ranked in the 9th percentile on the state's NCLB-mandated top-to-bottom list. While not a total shock, nonetheless it took some of the steam out of our sails as we struggled with the changing demographics and growing number of transient students coming to our district well below grade level. However, our staff refused to throw in the towel and with the assistance of a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) that allowed us to purchase and put in place a number of research-based reforms, initiatives we could not previously afford with Michigan's less-

Vision: Godfrey-Lee Public Schools will prepare each student to succeed in a global society.

than-equitable school funding scheme, I am proud to remind the Committee that Lee High School has improved from the 9th percentile to the 63rd percentile in just two school years. And the attitude and culture apparent in the high school tells me and anyone else who visits there that the staff, students and parents of Lee High School have only just begun.


So you see, we are a prime example that traditional public education can and does work when factors within our control come together with the purpose of improving low-performing schools. We provide not only a community-based education with a highly-qualified teacher in front of every child, but are also considered a leader in the area in the use of technology, provide on-line and hybrid learning opportunities, have students who participate in dual enrollment, provide access to AP courses, and have a high percentage of college acceptance in our graduating classes. Additionally, we collaborate with districts around us as well as our county ISD on new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

We are also a “district of choice” for nearly twenty-four percent of our students who along with their parents choose to travel into the district every day to attend our schools, another testament to public education.

Our public school district is working despite the odds against us and despite the continuing lack of support from this legislature and Governor Snyder. We often wonder just how far we could go with our students if only we had the financial and instructional resources needed to provide each and every one of them with equity of opportunity despite the fact they choose to live and attend school in an impoverished community. Expanding the Educational Achievement Authority and expanding for-profit competitors that would only serve to diminish our declining state and local resources even further is not necessary and in fact puts our kids at greater risk with untested and unproven educational structures.

I implore you to stop the assault on our schools and instead focus your energies on collaborative efforts to improve our existing system with proper and equitable financial support, encouragement, and innovative ideas that make Michigan’s public school system the best in the country and a leader around the world.

Respectfully,


David Britten
Lieutenant Colonel, USA, Retired
Superintendent of Schools